

# CHAPTER 6: PARKS AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

Parks, open space, and recreational opportunities are important, not only to enhance quality of life and neighborhood vitality, but also to preserve natural resources and provide alternative transportation links between our neighborhoods and growth centers. Over the years, the City of Fort Worth has recognized these benefits and has strived to increase these opportunities, earning the State Gold Medal in 1992, 1994, 2001, and 2005 from the Texas Recreation and Park Society for having the best managed large park system in the state, as well as earning the National Gold Medal in 1996 for having the best managed large park system in the United States.

The City of Fort Worth provides park and recreational opportunities through the Parks and Community Services Department (PACS), whose mission is “to enrich the lives of our citizens through the stewardship of our resources and the responsive provision of quality recreational opportunities and community services.” To meet the needs and desires of Fort Worth citizens, the department completed a Park, Recreation, and Open Space Master Plan which was adopted by the City Council in June 2004. The major issues identified in the Master Plan are outlined in this Chapter.

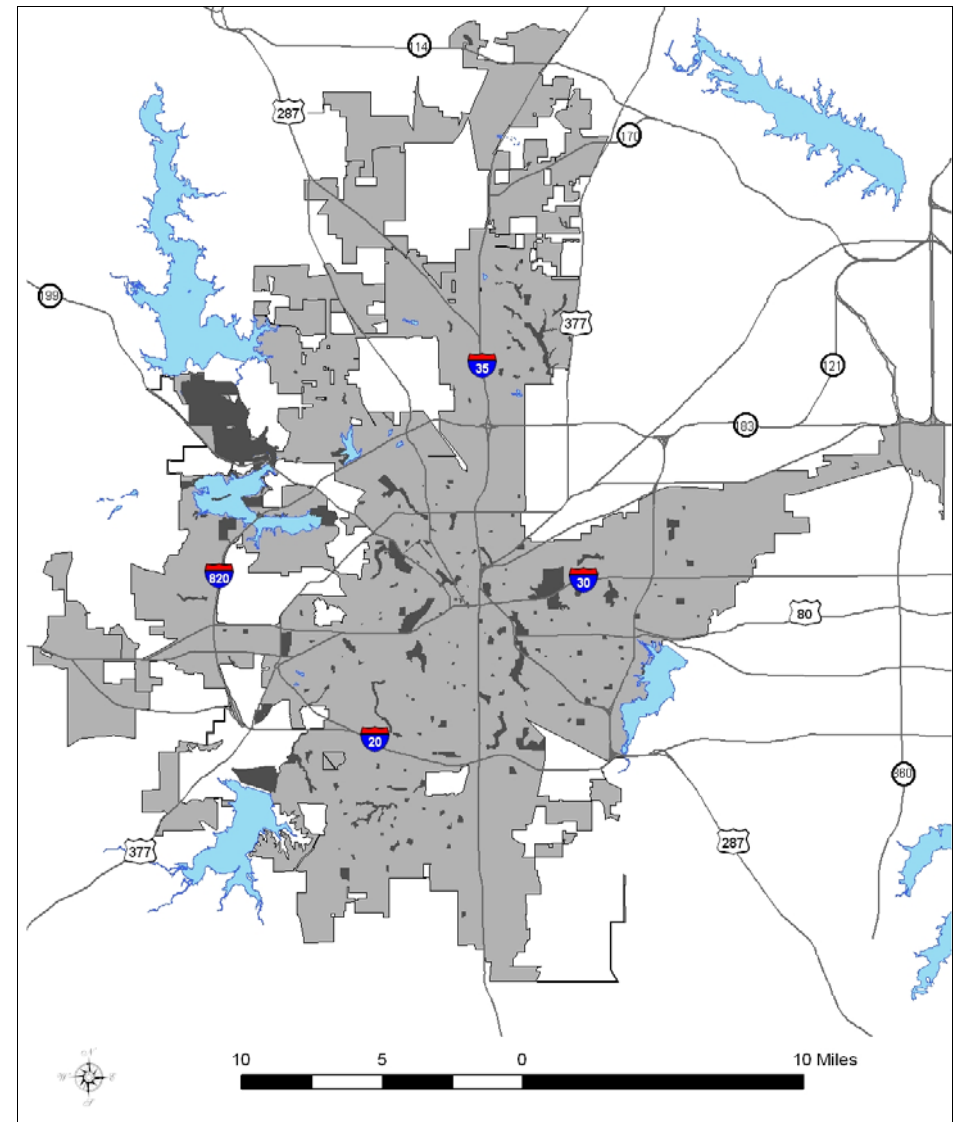
## EXISTING CONDITIONS AND TRENDS

Fort Worth has 227 parks. The park sites total approximately 10,698 acres and include 147 playgrounds, 105 practice fields, 46 competition baseball/softball fields, 33 competition soccer fields, 107 basketball courts, 98 tennis courts, 7 pools, 5 golf courses (108 holes), approximately 58 miles of trails (with over 30 miles of Trinity River Trail), and 104 picnic shelters.

### Park Classifications

Fort Worth’s park and recreational sites are grouped into four classifications, based on the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) standards that use size, service area, and uses as distinguishing characteristics. The four park classifications are Neighborhood, Community, Large Recreation, and Special Use Park. These classifications and standards assist the City in evaluating the current park system and in planning for future sites and facilities. In 2005, there were 163 neighborhood parks, 30 community parks, 7 large recreation parks, and 27 special use parks. The four park classifications are grouped into two types of parkland. Large recreation and the larger special use parks (such as golf courses and the Nature Center) are considered Regional parkland. Smaller special use parks (such as urban parks/plazas), neighborhood parks and community parks are considered Close-to-Home parkland. The City standard for parkland as adopted in the Park, Recreation and Open Space Master Plan is 21.25 acres per 1,000 persons and is based on NRPA standards for parkland. The greatest deficiency is in Regional parkland, though there is also a need for additional Close-to-Home parkland. Based on projected population,

**Existing Park Sites**



Fort Worth has 227 parks with 10,698 acres of parkland. (Source: Parks and Community Services Department, 2005.)

5,968 acres of parkland will need to be acquired by 2025 to meet the 21.25 acres of parkland per 1,000 population standard.

**Recreational Facilities**

Recreational facilities provided at park sites offer an important service to the surrounding areas. Neighborhood parks are typically within walking distance of residential areas. Generally, they include playgrounds and picnic areas, non-structured open space, and provisions for informal field and court games, such as softball or soccer. Community parks include similar facilities, though more formal fields for organized sports are generally provided. Some also have athletic field lighting, depending on site characteristics and surrounding land uses. Large recreation parks often have space set aside for natural areas. They also include facilities similar to those in community parks, along with more intense uses such as tennis centers, swimming pools, and community centers to serve the larger regional population. Special use parks are oriented towards a particular use and are intended to serve the entire city. Many have a regional draw. The Fort Worth Nature Center and Wildlife Refuge, Botanic Garden, golf courses, Log Cabin Village, and the Fort Worth Zoo are examples.

The NRPA standards for park and recreational facilities use population size to determine the number of recreation facilities needed to serve a community. Based on these standards, in 2005, Fort Worth was in need of an additional 26 competition soccer fields, 11 tennis courts, 27 playgrounds and 5 skate parks.

**Community Centers**

The City operates a total of 19 community centers that serve multiple functions for the community within a 1 1/2 to 3 mile radius service area. Regional facilities include the Haws Athletic Center, located near Downtown adjacent to the Police and Fire Training Center, Bertha Collins Sports Center, Botanic Garden, Fort Worth Nature Center and Wildlife Refuge, and the Log Cabin Village.

The services administered by PACS are divided into two categories: Recreation programs and Unique programs. Recreation programs include sports programs and leagues, individual recreation opportunities such as weight lifting and aquatics, life skills programs, and cultural and social programs such as senior lunches and dancing. Unique Programs include a variety of crime prevention programs, social and neighborhood services programs, homework assistance, and health and child care services. Many of the community centers are also used for meeting space by homeowners associations, neighborhood advisory councils, organized youth activities, and some serve as emergency shelters and Safe Havens for children. Social services are provided through the countywide Neighborhood Resources Development Program (NRDP) sites at seven Fort Worth community centers, and two neighborhood offices located outside the city limits. Direct and referral services (food, clothing, utility, shelter, transportation assistance, etc.) are provided to individuals and families with incomes at or below 125 percent of the Federal Poverty Income Guidelines.

**Fort Worth’s Recreation Facility Needs, Based on Local and National Recreation and Park Association Standards**

Facility	Standard per 1,000 population	Required Facilities	Existing Facilities	Needed Facilities
Competition Soccer Fields	1:10	55	29	26
Basketball Courts	1:5	109	103	6
Playgrounds	1:4	137	110	27
Tennis Courts	1:5	109	98	11

Fort Worth uses the National Recreation and Park Association standards for recreational facilities as a basis for determining the City’s facility needs. A five-year plan has been developed to address deficiencies. *(Source: Parks and Community Services Department, 2005.)*

**National Recreation and Park Association Standards for Park Classifications**

Classification	Acres	Service Area (Radius Miles)	Service Population
Neighborhood	5 to 20	¼ to ½	3,000 to 6,000
Community	30 to 75	1 to 1 ½	18,000 to 36,000
Large Recreation	≥ 75	2 to 4	80,000 to 100,000
Special Use	Depends on Use	City	City

Fort Worth uses the park classification and standards listed above to determine size and location of parks and to evaluate the park system. Fort Worth has 163 neighborhood parks, 30 community parks, 7 large recreation parks, and 27 special use parks. *(Source: Parks and Community Services Department, 2005.)*

## Trinity River Trails

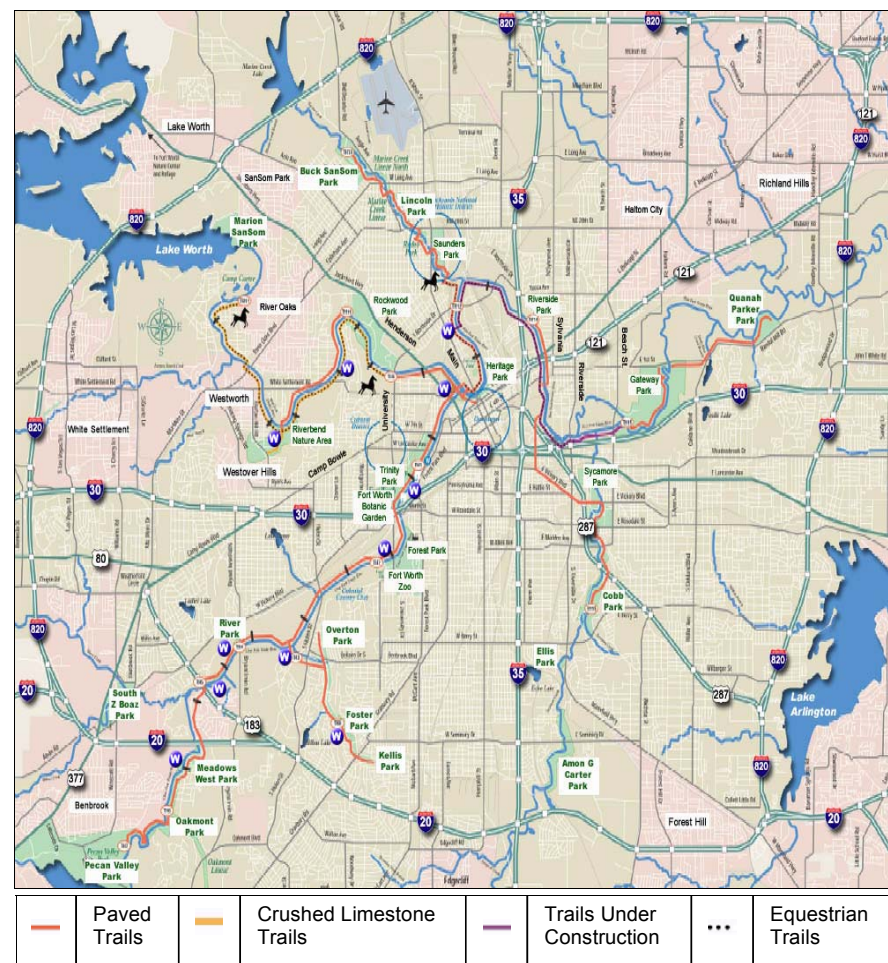
Over 30 miles of surfaced trails exist along the Trinity River and Marine Creek. The trails are within the floodplain of the Trinity River and its tributaries. Surfaces are provided for biking, walking, in-line skating, and horseback riding. These green belts are important, not only for protecting the Trinity River and its floodplains and providing accessible recreation and open space opportunities, but also for providing alternative transportation between neighborhoods and activity and employment centers. Work was recently completed to expand the trail system along the Trinity's West Fork and Sycamore Creek to connect with the existing trails. The Clear Fork of the Trinity River connects south and southwest neighborhoods to Downtown, and also links major parks, such as Pecan Valley Park and Golf Course, Oakmont Park, Forest Park, Trinity Park, and Heritage Park. Expansion of the greenway system along the Clear Fork to Lake Benbrook was completed in November 1999. The West Fork of the Trinity River provides an opportunity for linking Lake Worth to Downtown, and for connecting many west and northwest neighborhoods to the City park system. The West Fork will also provide linkages from Downtown to neighborhoods in east Fort Worth and eventually to Arlington and the eastern portion of the regional trail system.

## Trinity River Vision Master Plan

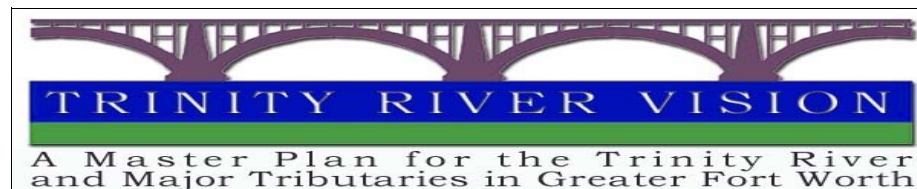
The *Trinity River Master Plan* was initiated by Streams and Valleys, Inc., in 1990 and updated under the name of the *Tilley Plan* in 1999. The Master Plan recommended improvement of 43 miles of the Trinity River Corridor along the Clear Fork and the West Fork. The plan emphasized the importance of using the river corridors to connect parks and lakes, activity centers, and neighborhoods. The plan recognized the importance of connecting the river system and the urban landscape by providing well marked and convenient entrances to the system from many points in the City. Recreational activity is an important part of the plan: recommendations were made for canoe runs, access points, and trails for walking, bicycling, and horseback riding. An agreement between the City and Tarrant Regional Water District provides for shared responsibility of maintenance and expansion of the greenway network.

The City Council adopted a far-sighted update of this plan, the *Trinity River Vision Master Plan*, in 2003. It has an enlarged scope that encompasses approximately 88 miles of river and creek corridor. Along with expanding on the existing Master Plan recommendations, it contains recommendations to improve the river's accessibility to the public, attract more people to its banks, to develop an urbanized Downtown waterfront while maintaining the natural character of the more remote areas, and to increase awareness of its presence and beauty by citizens and visitors. The plan identifies opportunities for conservation, linkages, and open space. The primary goals include identifying and improving adjoining land uses and enhancing environmental quality and flood control. The proposed Downtown waterfront, known as Trinity Uptown, is also discussed in Chapter 14: Urban Design.

## Trinity River Trails



Connections to adjacent neighborhoods and parks are very important to revitalizing the Trinity River. The Trinity River Vision Master Plan proposes many strategically placed linkages to allow easy access to the river from almost anywhere in the City. (Source: *Trinity River Vision Master Plan*, 2003.)





### **Nature Center and Refuge Master Plan**

In June 2003, the City Council adopted a master plan to improve and enhance facilities at the Fort Worth Nature Center and Refuge. The mission of the plan is to establish a signature heritage that reflects not only the regional character of Fort Worth and North Central Texas, but communicates Fort Worth's community values of preserving natural open space for future generations. The *Nature Center and Refuge Master Plan* includes a clear analysis of the local and regional market for visitors, compares the Nature Center to other similar facilities that may be used as benchmarks for improving the Nature Center, and includes recommendations for resource management practices, land use management, operations, governance, and economic growth. The Master Plan also includes recommendations for new facilities, the update of existing facilities, interpretive exhibits and needed supporting infrastructure. The Master Plan also identifies opportunities for capital improvements in the amount of \$64.6 million over a forty-year period with a majority of this funding to be raised from private and community sources. In November 2005, the City Council approved the establishment of user fees for the nature center that will go into effect in spring 2006.

### **Trends**

Fort Worth is growing, and will continue to grow well into the 21st century, with a projected 2025 population of 784,300. With this growth comes a decrease in the amount of undeveloped land. As population increases, an additional demand will be placed on existing parks and recreational facilities. New facilities and open spaces will be needed to provide for additional population. Much of the growth is expected to occur in the Far North, Far Northwest, Far South, Far Southwest and Far West sectors.

Fort Worth is committed to central city revitalization. The Downtown area is experiencing high density residential development and commercial redevelopment, which has placed a strain on existing urban parkland and created a demand for more urban park space and links to river corridor recreational opportunities. Growth centers and urban villages, with their increased density, will require recreation and open space opportunities, as well as links to rivers, lakes, and other activity centers. Urban parks and public plazas will play an important role in these urbanized areas, similar to the role that Heritage Park, Burnett Park, Hyde Park, and the Water Gardens play in Downtown.

### **Tourism**

Fort Worth's parks are attractions for both residents and visitors alike. Many of the City's premier park attractions, such as the Zoo, Botanic Garden, Nature Center and Wildlife Refuge, Log Cabin Village, and Water Gardens, are important to the Fort Worth economy. For example, the Zoo alone attracts approximately one million visitors annually. In the 2004 Needs Assessment Survey, the majority of park users responded that they had taken out-of-town visitors to the Fort Worth Zoo and Botanic Garden. A great number of respondents reported taking visitors to the Water Gardens and Trinity Park.

### **Fort Worth Nature Center and Refuge**



The Fort Worth Nature Center and Wildlife Refuge comprises over one-third of all the park system in Fort Worth, and at 3,600+ acres, it is one of the largest nature centers in the United States. (Source: Parks and Community Services Department, 2003)

### **Percentage of Park Users that Take Out-of-Town Visitors to Park Attractions**

<b>Parks Visited</b>	<b>Percentage of Park Users</b>
Fort Worth Zoo	63
Botanic Garden	60
Water Gardens	46
Trinity Park	35
Other Fort Worth Parks	32

Of the 600 park users who were surveyed for the Master Plan Update, 63 percent reported taking out-of-town visitors to the Fort Worth Zoo. (Source: Parks and Community Services Department, 2004.)

One of the most popular attractions of the Fort Worth park system is the Fort Worth Herd. Daily cattle drives conducted in the Historic Fort Worth Stockyards are a recreation of the great cattle drives of the late 1800s. Six cowhands ride with the 15 longhorn steers down Exchange Street through the heart of the Historic Stockyards. Proclaimed as the "Last Great Cattle Drive of the Century" at its 1999 kickoff, it was publicized worldwide and generated an estimated \$1.3 million in free publicity for Fort Worth. Each year since its inception, one quarter of a million people view the daily drives. The Herd has received four prestigious awards: the Advertising Club of Fort Worth *Dateline Award*, the Texas Recreation and Park Society *Lone Star Programming Award*, the City/County Communication and Marketing Association *Award of Excellence*, and the Texas Recreation and Park Society Promotional Award.

As the Fort Worth economy continues to diversify and surrounding markets remain highly competitive, the value of the City's premier park facilities may be an important factor in business relocation decisions. These facilities are also important in convincing convention coordinators and tourists to choose Fort Worth.

#### **Parkland Acquisition**

The City Council responded to future population demands on the City's existing park system by adopting a revised Neighborhood and Community Park Dedication Policy in April 2000, based on the national standard, requiring dedication of parkland at a rate of 2.5 acres per 1,000 population for neighborhood parks (or fee in-lieu-of dedication); and dedication of land for community parks at a rate of 3.75 acres per 1,000 population (or fee in-lieu-of dedication). The policy also requires that developers construct or provide the funding for construction of first phase improvements for neighborhood park improvements as a project cost, with the City committing to appropriate maintenance funds once the improvements are completed and accepted by the City. Revision to this policy in December 2000 allows credit for private recreational facilities that will meet the recreational needs of the population served by the private development.

In 2004, the Neighborhood and Community Park Dedication Policy was revised to address the increasing density within the central city. Designated by City Council, the central city is generally defined as the area inside Loop 820. All new residential development within this area will be assessed a flat fee of \$500 per additional unit. This action gives stronger means for meeting criteria for park grants targeting the central city and as matches for leveraging grants for improving the Trinity River Corridor.

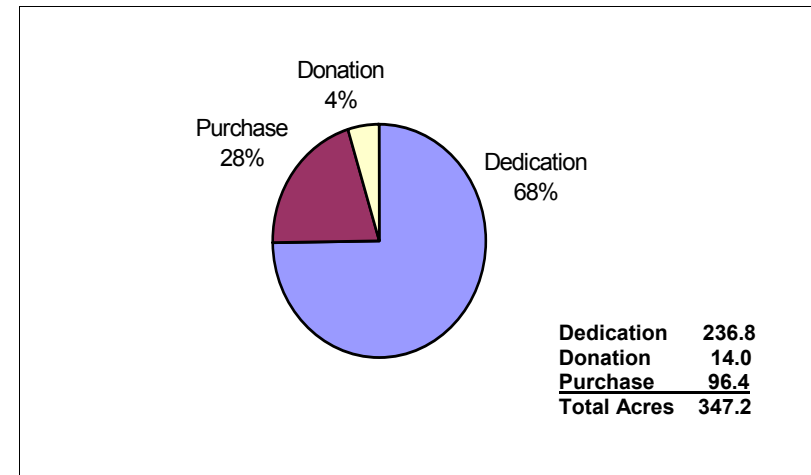
Dedications are an important means of obtaining parkland, comprising more than two-thirds of that acquired in the past five years. Private donations and joint use agreements are another means of obtaining parkland. The City is exploring more joint use agreements with the ISDs that serve Fort Worth. In addition, PACS reviews City-owned surplus property before it is auctioned to the public. In the past

#### **Fort Worth Herd**



Since June 1999, the Fort Worth Herd has won four prestigious awards and logged 4,495 cattle drives. Each year, over a quarter of a million people view the daily drives. From May 2004 to May 2005, 20,629 students have participated in the Herd Education Program. (Source: Parks and Community Services Department, 2005.)

#### **Methods of Parkland Acquisition, 2000-2005**



The 2000 Neighborhood and Community Park Dedication Policy has provided for the acquisition of a considerable amount of parkland through dedication, donation and purchase over the past five years. (Source: Parks and Community Services Department, 2005.)

two years, 33.6 acres of surplus property have been identified as suitable for additional parkland. Many of these parcels fall in built-out central city areas where land acquisition at fair market value is difficult and costly. A proactive acquisition strategy of purchase and set aside, coupled with park dedication requirements for residential developers, would serve both to protect our natural resources and to provide land for recreation activities for future generations. In 2005, the Parks and Community Services Department purchased 104 acres of land for a future community park in East Fort Worth, adjacent to the Trinity River at I-30 and Cooks Lane.

## GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Restore and maintain the viability of the park, recreation, and open space system by renovating existing facilities.

- Renovate existing playgrounds to bring them into compliance with Consumer Product Safety Guidelines, and continue a program to replace or renovate playgrounds on a 20-year cycle.
- Continue renovating or replacing existing trails through 2006.
- Provide first phase development of reserve parks acquired through the Neighborhood and Community Park Dedication Policy when neighborhood units reach 50 percent build out or a population of 2,000 or greater and when funds are appropriated to develop and maintain the improvements.

Provide new parkland and facilities to meet park, recreation, and open space needs in developing areas of the City.

- Develop the first phase of the Southwest Community Park and Athletic Complex by the end of 2006.
- Increase park acreage per 1,000 persons from 17.29 acres per 1,000 to 21.25 acres per 1,000 by 2020 by expanding close-to-home and regional park space, concentrating on under-served areas in the central city.

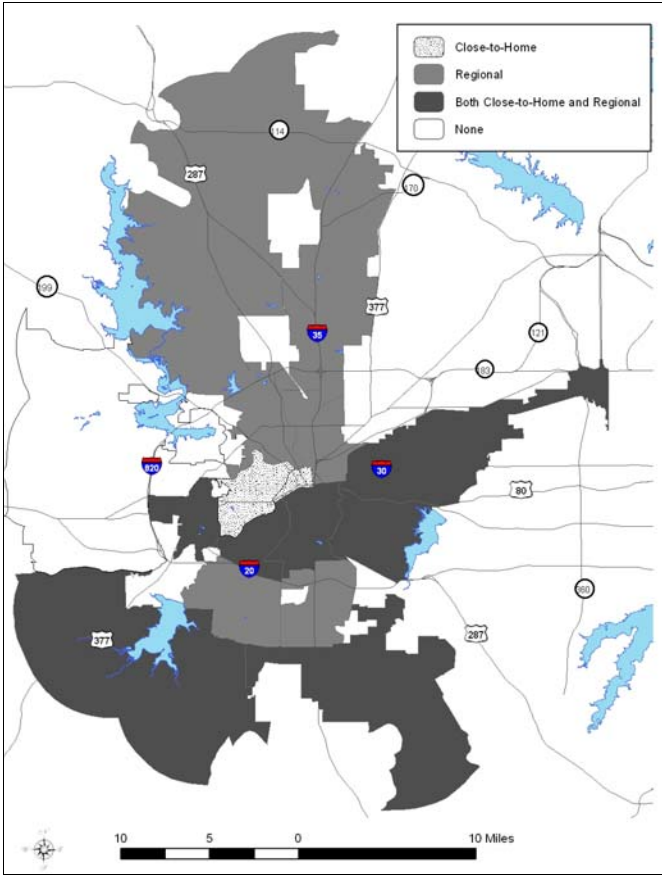
Improve the variety of park, recreation, and open space opportunities available to the community.

- Provide park facilities where service levels fall below standards, including 26 competition soccer fields, 6 basketball courts, 11 tennis courts, and 5 skate parks by the end of 2010.
- Provide a safe and comprehensive golf program through a municipal enterprise fund that is self-supporting from user fees.

Improve and enhance tourism and educational opportunities.

- Renovate facilities and infrastructure identified in the 1998 Capital Improvement Program at the Fort Worth Zoo through a partnership with the Fort Worth Zoological Association by the end of 2006.

Sectors Deficient in Parkland



Sectors Deficient in Close-to-Home Parkland Only	Sectors Deficient in Regional Parkland Only	Sectors Deficient in Both Close-to-Home and Regional Parkland
Arlington Heights	Far North	Eastside
Downtown	Far Northwest	Far South
	Northeast	Far Southwest
	Northside	Southeast
	Sycamore	Southside
	Wedgwood	TCU/Wescliff
		Western Hills/Ridglea

The map and table depict sectors deficient in parkland according to City and national standards. (Source: Parks and Community Services Department, 2004.)



- Replace the Cross Timbers Trail Bridge to access large areas of the Fort Worth Nature Center and Wildlife Refuge by the end of 2006.
- Complete implementation of Botanic Garden Master Plan by 2020.

Provide additional hike and bike trails in the floodplains of the Trinity River and its tributaries through a cooperative effort with Streams and Valleys, Inc., the Tarrant Regional Water District, the North Central Texas Council of Governments, and partner municipalities.

- Complete Trinity Trail segment east to Loop 820 by the end of 2010.
- Expand trail system to include southern sections of Sycamore Creek to the southern end of Carter Park by 2010 and Lincolnshire Park by 2020.
- Build Trinity Trail connection between Loop 820 and Arlington by 2020.
- Work with bordering municipalities and Tarrant County to connect Arcadia Trail to Trinity Trail in the White's Branch and Fossil Creek Corridor by 2020.

Build and enhance community partnerships to deliver quality services and facilities.

- Each year, build partnerships with willing Independent School Districts (ISDs) serving the City of Fort Worth to pursue cooperative use of facilities in the delivery of recreation and community programs and services.

Preserve and enhance the City's natural resources.

- Preserve and enhance river and creek floodplains as parks, open space, and trail corridor linkages by taking steps to minimize reclamation of the 100-year floodplain, thus limiting flood hazards. The development of an interdepartmental floodplain conservation team to prepare a plan is in progress.
- Develop a plan that identifies, conserves, and recognizes historical, archeological, and cultural resources within the existing park system by the end of 2006.

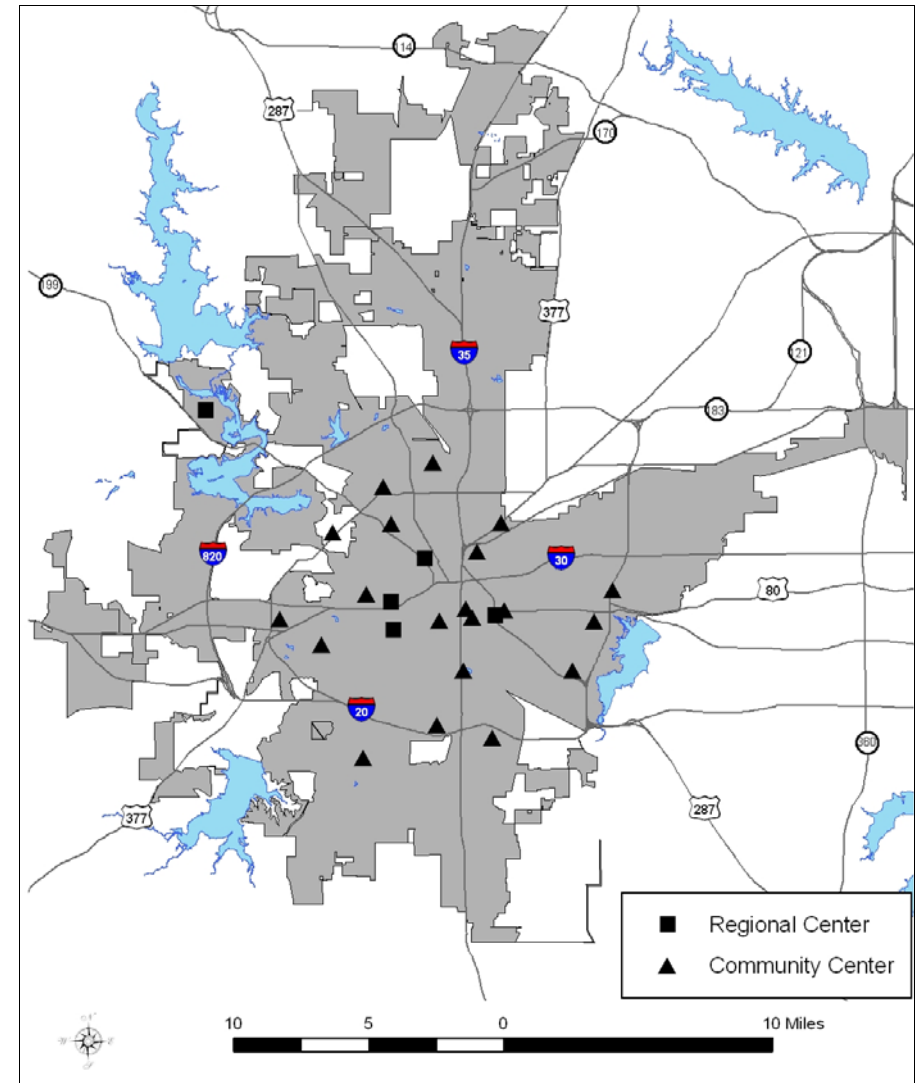
## POLICIES AND STRATEGIES

The City of Fort Worth will use the policies outlined in the Park, Recreation, and Open Space Master Plan and the 2003 Trinity River Vision Master Plan to provide park, open space, and recreational opportunities to its citizens:

### Current Policies

- Work with local, state, and federal organizations to provide coordinated community services and a City park system that is effectively managed and conserves and protects City resources.
- Develop attractive and secure park, recreation, open space, and community service facilities that are accessible to all citizens, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, age, income, sexual orientation or physical ability.
- Actively promote citizen involvement in determining park, recreation, and open space needs and desires of the community.

### City of Fort Worth Community Centers



The City of Fort Worth has a total of 19 community centers that have a 1 1/2 to 3 mile radius service area. The Botanic Garden, Fort Worth Nature Center & Refuge, Haws Athletic Center, Bertha Collins Sports Center, and the Log Cabin Village are regional facilities that serve the entire city. (Source: Parks and Community Services Department, 2005.)

- Preserve and enhance rivers, creeks, and floodplains as parks and public open space and as linkages to neighborhoods.
- Provide parkland in areas of the City that are currently deficient.
- Pursue implementation of the Trinity River Vision Master Plan in cooperation with Streams and Valleys, Inc., the Tarrant Regional Water District, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

#### **Recommended Policy**

- Seek means to develop and support a system of urban parks and open space that links neighborhoods to growth centers as well as other park, recreation and community facilities.

#### **Strategies**

- Review Comin' Up Gang Intervention Program annually for funding purposes.
- Seek grants and other non-City funding resources for park development and other projects.
- Develop plan for providing computer labs at all community centers.

## **PROGRAMS AND PROJECTS**

#### **Programs**

Fort Worth has a number of programs that provide park and recreational opportunities to the community. They include the following:

- The Urban Forestry Program plants an average of 1,200 new trees annually throughout the City to improve air quality and streetscape aesthetics.
- Mayfest is held every year in May along the banks of the Trinity River in Trinity Park. The festival is sponsored by Streams and Valleys, Inc.; Mayfest, Inc.; Tarrant Regional Water District; and the Parks and Community Services Department. Money raised by the event is used for improvements in the Trinity River Corridor.
- PACS works with the Independent School Districts to avoid duplication of park and recreational facilities. School facilities play an important role in meeting the recreational needs of Fort Worth youth. The City has shared facility agreements for many park sites, athletic facilities, educational facilities and services, and transportation.
- Many recreational programs are offered at the City's community centers, including martial arts, dance, gymnastics, weight training, and Senior Education programs provided by Tarrant County College; life skills programs such as photography, junior golf, arts and crafts, and wood carving; youth sports programs and athletic leagues; cultural programs; and social programs including dancing and senior lunches. Volunteer opportunities for community service workers and employment opportunities for summer leaders and contract instructors are also available.
- PACS also offers a number of programs referred to as "Crime Prevention Programs." These programs include the Afterschool Evening/Late Night

## **Parkland and Facilities Meeting Needs**



Delga Park, located northeast of Downtown at 1400 Nixon Street, represents a typical neighborhood park. With nearly five acres, it contains a picnic shelter, playground area, softball/baseball practice fields, and basketball courts. (Source: Parks and Community Services Department, 2004.)



Rolling Hills Park, located in southeast Fort Worth, is 197 acres. It is considered a large recreation park, with 11 competition soccer fields, 4 soccer practice fields, 6 tennis courts, 1 competition softball/baseball field, and 1 practice field. A number of sports tournaments make use of the facilities throughout the year. (Source: Parks and Community Services Department, 2004.)



Program, Comin' Up Gang Intervention Program, Youth Sports Program, and Homework Assistance Center. Social and neighborhood services are also offered.

- Formal and informal educational opportunities are available at the Nature Center and Wildlife Refuge, Log Cabin Village, Fort Worth Zoo, Botanic Garden, and through the Fort Worth Herd.
- The I-30/I-35W landscape maintenance program is a contract and inspection program for mowing, litter removal and irrigation of the I-30/I-35W entrance corridor to Downtown.

### **Capital Improvement Projects**

The City of Fort Worth has a number of projects that will provide park, open space, and recreational opportunities for its citizens. Those needed in the next five years are included in the Park, Recreation, and Open Space Master Plan. Additional projects will be necessary over the next 20 years to serve the needs of the growing population in developing areas and rebuilding an aging central city infrastructure. Many of the special use parks have developed individual master plans or strategic plans that the City has adopted. These include the Trinity River Vision Master Plan, the Botanic Garden Master Plan, the Nature Center and Wildlife Refuge Master Plan, and the Gateway Park Master Plan.

Through the use of the Museum Assessment and Conservation Programs, the Log Cabin Village finalized its Master Plan, which includes the addition of an Education Center. Community and City resources will be required to implement these plans. The capital improvement projects identified for the next 20 years are listed in Appendices D and E, along with estimated costs, completion dates, and potential funding sources, which are subject to change.

